

Joseph Jackson

A Sermon

By William H. Lyon, D. D.

JOSEPH JACKSON

Fourth Minister of the Church of Christ in Brookline
1760 — 1796

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PREACHED IN THE FIRST PARISH MEETING HOUSE
OCTOBER 26, 1902

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BROOKLINE, MASS.
PUBLISHED BY THE PARISH
1902



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FOURTH MINISTER OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IN
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BY REV. WILLIAM H. LYON, D.D.

2 TIMOTHY 1 : 7. "*For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.*" *

The Rev. James Allen, the first Minister of the Church of Christ in Brookline, lived at that corner of Walnut and Cypress streets which is now occupied by Dr. George H. Francis. Opposite his house stretched a green lane which lost itself among the trees along the farthest part of what is now Chestnut street. If the spirit of the much-tried Minister could come back and stand in the front door of his ghostly house, how bewildered it would be to see the trolley car, propelled by a power invisible and to him unknown, whizzing through those spectral groves; or citizens dropping into an apparently silver box on a post letters curiously folded and bearing mysterious red spots on one corner; or an official in blue uniform and strange hat, opening a blue box on another post and applying his ear to the interior, as if some familiar spirit were shut therein; or, again, some frantic householder running down the hill, looking wildly around, rushing up to a red box on still another post, turning a handle upon

*This was the text taken by the Rev. Samuel Cooper, D.D., of the church in Brattle Square, Boston, for his sermon at the ordination of Mr. Jackson, April 9th, 1760.

it, and then running frantically up the hill again, while by some magical influence far off bells begin a solemn chime, and soon horses, men, and strange, lumbering machines come whirling along the roads. The Rev. James Allen would think himself come back to the wrong world.

Who can tell what is to be? Mr. Allen would have found these things bewildering, but he would have found other things saddening. He owned another house, a very old one, which must have been built a hundred years before, back in the days when Boston was still a village and Muddy River was given out in allotments to its citizens for pasturage. This house, which stood a little farther up Walnut street, on the same side, not far from the present Kennard road, was taken down three years after his death; and from its stanch timbers a new one was built, to be the home of the Rev. Cotton Brown, Mr. Allen's successor, who had married his daughter. Before the house was finished, both the Minister and his wife were dead, he a year after her, April 13th, 1751, having had a ministry of only two years and a half. They were both buried in the tomb with Mr. Allen in the old cemetery.

Of course, at this distance and after so short a ministry, the Rev. Cotton Brown can be to us little more than a passing shadow. A side-light falls upon him from the fact that his niece was the wife of Peter Chardon Brooks, well known among the earlier Boston merchants; and in references made to him in the ordination sermon as well as in traditions which have somehow floated down to us, we discern a pleasant personality. The town evidently expected a long ministry, that is to say for life, according to the

custom of the time, and gave him a settlement, or fund to make a comfortable home, of a thousand pounds. It shows the relative importance of the church in the community of the day, that, while the Minister's salary was five hundred pounds, the other expenses of the town amounted to only two hundred.

No sermons of his have been preserved. The only evidence of his theological belief is found in a creed of thirteen articles which he wrote out before his ordination. The doctrinal storm which had so sorely tossed his predecessor about, rocked him with its ground swell, for, on September 20th, 1748, the church passed this vote:—

“That, although this Church, when they gave Mr. Cotton Brown a call to be their pastor, were well satisfied with regard to his principles in religion, so far as they were able to form a judgment of the same from his public preaching; yet, inasmuch as there have been, since that time, rumours abroad, as well as jealousies at home in the minds of some amongst ourselves, as if Mr. Brown was not sound in the faith; therefore

“Voted, That Mr. Brown be desired more fully to communicate his principles to this church, and to lay before them the articles of his faith, which desire Mr. Brown readily complied with, giving an account of his principles in the following articles.”

Reading these articles now, so far away from those days of controversy, we find it hard to tell how much or how little they may have meant. Their general tendency seems to be toward the liberal side of the division which then was beginning, or at least away from those ultra-Calvinistic opinions with which Jonathan Edwards had just been startling New England out of its indifference. It was surely not the doctrine of “total depravity” that was implied in the statement that by the fall of Adam “our natures are very much depraved.” The Westminster Catechism, which our fathers brought with them, said that “we are

utterly indisposed, disabled and made opposite to all good and wholly inclined to do evil." The article which treats of God is more than suggestive by what it does not say. "I believe," it ran, "in God, the Father, the Creator of the world and Lord of heaven and earth; and in his Son Jesus, who is the brightness of his Father's glory and the express image of his person, and the only Saviour of men; and in the Holy Ghost, by whose influences men are sanctified and comforted. I believe that these three are united in the common design of advancing their own glory and promoting the happiness of men." To be "united in a common design" seems not quite equal to saying, in the language of the same standard creed, "In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost." It would not be fair to call Mr. Brown a Unitarian, but change was in the air, and we are justified in thinking that, if he had come to the fork of the road at the beginning of the next century, there is little question which side the thoughtful minister would have taken. As for his church, the liberal teaching of James Allen for nearly thirty years had led them perhaps farther than they realized, for they voted "That this church are fully satisfied with regard to Mr. Brown's principles in religion and do approve of the same as being, in their apprehension, agreeable to the oracles of truth." The church, therefore, then, as before, and as it aims to do now, belonged rather to the "Broad Church" than to any sect.

The church found difficulty in securing a suitable successor to two so beloved Ministers. Robert Rogerson, who came after two years and a half of

miscellaneous "supplies" and "candidates," remained a year and then went to Rehoboth, where, indorsed by an honorary degree from Harvard, he had a useful and respected ministry for forty-four years. Not having been formally installed, he is not reckoned among the Ministers of this Parish, and has no memorial window. After a year more of trying and trial, Nathaniel Potter of New Jersey was called and ordained November 19th, 1755, but for reasons not stated came into town meeting after three and a half years of service and requested a dismissal, which was granted by the church, June 17th, 1759. The sole evidence of the theological position of the church at this time is found in a little note in its records that "the Church voted to admit members without publick relations," that is to say, without describing before the church their religious experiences. Such as it is, the vote shows still further the drift of the church to the liberal side.

It is a relief to turn from these short and broken ministries to the long and peaceful pastorate that followed them. Mr. Jackson was well known to the church before he became its Minister. He had often preached in Brookline, coming over from Harvard College when he was a tutor. On the very day when Mr. Potter asked his dismissal from the church, Mr. Jackson was invited to preach. He did so till Thanksgiving Day, November 29th, 1759, when, says the old book, "the church tarried, after the congregation was dismissed. . . . The church brought in their votes, and, upon viewing them, it appeared that Mr. Joseph Jackson was chosen to be our Minister by almost an unanimous vote." On his acceptance in February, the ordination was set for April 2d, but, as it was

found that this was Fast Day, the ninth was taken instead. It would never have done to have an ordination on a Fast Day in those times. When Mr. Potter was inducted into office, Deacon Gardner presented a bill of over two pounds for rum and sugar, besides much more for "turces, fowls, pork and puding pans," and, although we find that the two pounds were spent at Mr. Jackson's ordination for "crambres and Ross water," yet the charges for "butter and Eggs and Pickels," together with "cakes," made a yet higher total. There would seem to have been a certain incongruity between these items and a Fast Day. As the celebration of the beginning of a ministry to last thirty-six years, however, Deacon Gardner's second bill of fare was eminently appropriate.

Long as Mr. Jackson's ministry was, however, he remains almost as misty a figure as Mr. Cotton Brown. He was a very modest man, refusing to preach on public occasions, or to have any of his home sermons printed, while he ordered all his discourses left in manuscript at his death to be destroyed. That they were short, we find from the testimony of Francis Bernard, the Royal Governor of the province, whose country seat was on the farther side of Jamaica Pond, and who used to attend regularly at this church. "He gave as one reason for his preference that the preacher in Brookline was shorter in his services than most Puritanical divines, particularly the Roxbury minister."

There remain, however, four "charges" which he gave to ministers at their ordination or installation, and which were printed with the discourses and other addresses delivered on such occasions. They are very brief, but earnest, dignified, and impressive.

Even these words of his, however, come down to us, as it were, under protest. The Rev. Jeremy Belknap, the first minister of the Long Lane, afterwards Federal Street Church, in Boston, who had delivered the sermon at the ordination of the Rev. Jedidiah Morse in Charlestown, wrote to his friend Hazard on May 30th, 1789: "The sermon was delayed a whole week by the extreme diffidence of the gentleman who gave the charge, who was all that time considering whether he would give a copy of it or not, and it did not get to the press till yesterday morning." To which Mr. Hazard replied, "What a diffident gentleman Mr. Jackson must be!"

On the other hand, he is said to have been a vigorous and fearless preacher, energetic in gesture and abundant in voice, practical in application of Scripture, and as liable to attack the sins and shortcomings of his own people as those of the ancient Jews. Some of his hearers walked long distances to listen to him, even from Dorchester. With all his vigor he seems to have had tact and good sense. The old divisions in the church continued to heal, and its life settled down into peace and fruitfulness. The people loved and respected their minister and he concentrated himself upon their service. Excepting the charges mentioned and the fact that he was chosen a delegate to represent the town in 1787 at a state convention to take under consideration the form of government for the United States, we scarcely hear of him outside the town. This choice, however, is a sign of the esteem and confidence which he received from his fellow citizens. He was a minister of the old-fashioned order, somewhat reserved and perhaps severe in bearing, an object of awe and

anxiety to children, but from the fact that the only relics of him that survive, besides the fine old desk that is below in the Minister's room, are a pair of tobacco tongs and a tin case for pipes, we may conclude that the severe clergyman, with his powdered wig, black gown, and white bands, had a genial side to him.

Sorrow came upon the good man, however. In 1790 his only son died, and he never recovered from the shock. He gradually failed, and, feeling his strength ebbing away, he prayed that life and usefulness might end together. The prayer was granted. On the Sunday before his death he preached twice, as usual, and had arranged for a supply the next Sunday, but on Friday, July 22d, 1796, he suddenly died. He was buried in his family tomb under King's Chapel, almost exactly a century before this Parish sent to that church a living minister.

He left a church united and, as far as possible in so small and poor a town, prosperous. In 1771 a bell was given to it by the will of Nicholas Boylston, Esq., and the following year a steeple was built by the town to hold it, on the end of the old meeting-house which rested where now the stable stands on this side of the Parsonage. Under him, also, the musical part of worship seems to have received increased attention, for we read in the Town Records of January 1st, 1778, that "the Town will allow the Singing Society leave to form the requested Seats in the Gallery into a Pew for their better Accommodation, they making the desired Alteration at their own Expence." In the year of his coming, the old "Bay Psalm Book," which had probably gone out of print, was replaced by "Tate and Brady's version of the psalms with some of Dr. Watts' hymns."

It was during this ministry also that the Parsonage lot was given. Its history may prove interesting to others, as it is to those who so happily live in it. In 1763 we find that Henry Sewall, great-grandson of Chief Justice Sewall, owned the house and land on Walnut street, about where now Mr. Bennett lives. At his death, this property descended to his son Samuel, who lived there until 1774, when his Tory principles compelled him to seek the climate of Nova Scotia, which, though colder, was discovered by many of his way of thinking to be more salubrious. Most of his landed estate was confiscated, and passed into the hands of Mr. John Heath, whose descendants are still honored residents in the town and beneficent members of the Parish ; but this piece became the property of Mr. Sewall's sister, Hannah, who had married Mr. Edward Kitchen Wolcott. On the fourteenth day of August, 1781, this couple conveyed to the town, by a deed which the Clerk of the Parish still holds, the upper part of this land, lying between the Sewall house and the meeting-house, and measuring thirty-four rods, "for the purpose and use of the Minister of the Congregational Church in said town of Brookline, whereof the Rev. Joseph Jackson is the present Pastor, and his successors in that office forever." A Parsonage was much needed, for the house in which Mr. Jackson had lived for many years had been rendered useless by a fire, and we find him petitioning the General Court in 1780 to be allowed to remain in the house of Mr. Hulton, one of the commissioners under the Stamp Act, and at that time residing in England for his comfort and safety. This house stood where now stands the house built by Mr. Moses Williams and owned by Mr. Hunt, opposite the pres-

ent meeting-house. One John Green had attached it for a printing debt incurred by Mr. Hulton, and apparently meant to turn the Minister out ; which would oblige him, says the petitioner, "to obtain shelter in some other Town, as no other House in Brookline can be procured in which he can be Accommodated." In answer to this petition, John Hancock, Speaker of the House of Representatives, sent up for concurrence a resolution that the minister and the printer shall have the preference in leasing the property, and shall, if they lease it together, divide it between them "in Equal halves." What was done in the matter is not known. It was probably with reference to the Minister's distress that the town voted on May 31st, 1781, "to Purchase a piece of land and Build a Ministerial House thereon," and "that the Sum of two Hundred pounds in Silver Money be Raised . . . to be paid in Paper Money, Labour, Meterals, or any other articles, Equal to Silver Money." It was also voted "that Said House be two Story High uprite, not exceeding Eleven Hundred Square feet on the ground." It was a most generous gift to the cause of religion. When we remember that this was in a time of war, when a feeble folk were gathering all their strength to get free from a powerful nation, and that a silver dollar was worth seventy-five paper ones, the largeness of the appropriation stands out in bold relief. The gift of the Wolcotts, therefore, was a very timely as well as a generous one, for it may be that Mr. Jackson's petition did not succeed, or that he found it not convenient to share his home "in Equal halves" with another family. At all events, the Parsonage was built, and remained till the present one was substituted in 1856 at the coming of Dr.

Hedge. To the land then given was afterwards added, in 1834, the adjoining piece on which the old meeting-house had stood, the town including it among the property to be left with the First Parish when it ceased to be dependent upon public taxation. The Parsonage, therefore, owes its existence to private beneficence, to the generosity of the town, and to the Revolution, which caused the confiscation of the Tory estates. If, therefore, the successive Ministers who occupy it should prove to be ardent lovers of their country and devoted citizens of their town, it must be ascribed partly to the history of the house in which they live.

There is something admirable, also, in the generosity of the town toward the Minister's support in those trying days. The population was very small, not over five hundred in number, and the influx of wealth which made the town tediously famous in the next century had not even begun. Yet at every town meeting inquiry was made whether the Minister's salary was sufficient to his needs. He was not left a victim to the wide fluctuations of the currency of those times. His salary was calculated in terms of the cost of living. Thus, in 1780, it was voted "That a Committee be Chosen to Examine into the prices of the above-mentioned articles (corn and hay, beef and mutton), and report once a month what sum ought to be paid to make it (the salary) equal to the abovementioned prices . . . and that Mr. Jackson be repaid Such sums as he has been obliged to Expend out of his own Estate in time pas'd." How much this meant is seen in the objection offered to fixing the salaries of officers of the state under the Bill of Rights, "because it would require at least a Double

Sum for an Honorable Support in Such Times as the Present to what would be necessary in Times of Peace and Plenty." The year before, 1779, instead of the £80 and four quarterly contributions, not over £100 in all, which the town had agreed to give their Minister, it voted a salary of "one Thousand Five Hundred pounds in the whole for his Comfortable Support During the Current year," this being nearly one third of the whole amount raised to defray the charges of the town, war grants and taxes included. These figures are given to show how dear in a double sense were the churches to our fathers.

As to the Brookline of Mr. Jackson's day, a writer in the Boston Magazine of 1785 said that "when the town was incorporated [in 1705] it consisted of about fifty families, and they can number no more at present. . . . This is owing [how familiar the words sound even now!] to constant emigrations of young people back into the country, where land is cheaper and farms are more easily obtained. . . . It appears that in the last twenty-five years . . . the number of births has been to that of the deaths as five to four. It appears also that of the 215 who have died in that time . . . nearly two in seven have arrived to sixty, more than one in five to seventy, and nearly one in eleven to eighty. The Town must therefore be pronounced very healthy." Yet the population did not increase, owing to the tendency named, over a century ago, to move farther out into the country.

Toward the end of Mr. Jackson's ministry, however, signs appeared not only of an increase in the population but of a change in its character. Dr. Pierce counted seventy-two families in 1796, thirty-eight above and thirty-four below the meeting-house, and

in 1805 the number had grown to eighty-eight. This increase he attributes almost entirely to the adoption of Brookline as a summer residence by the wealthier citizens of Boston and^s Salem, some of whom, said that enthusiastic lover of his town, built mansions "which, for taste and elegance, may vie with the palaces of Europe." It touches one's sense of humor, however, to think that the town, and especially that part of the town which was chosen as a summer resort at the beginning of the nineteenth century, should be such a summer desert at the beginning of the twentieth. The temperature has not risen, yet this region to which the Bostonians gladly fled for coolness then is commonly described now as being "a hot place"; and he who, coming by chance in August through its shady and well watered roads and looking with refreshment upon its lawns and gardens, finds scarcely a sign of human life, recalls with a smile that sentence near the close of Samuel Aspinwall Goddard's pamphlet, describing the population from 1800 to 1810: "It should be mentioned that the Boston gentlemen, at this time, Messrs. Higginson, Mason, Sullivan, Amory, Perkins and Babcock, reside in Brookline during the summer months only." And as one thinks of our Sunday-school now closing in May to re-open only in the middle of October, one recalls that when it was established, about 1826, it was open during the summer, say from April to November, and closed the whole winter, probably on account of the difficulty of reaching the house through the snow and over the windy hills.

This singular and complete reversal of the old order of the year in Brookline is due, of course, very largely to the rise of communication by steam, which

makes it possible for the city resident to reach the seashore or more distant hills in as little time as his carriage used to need to come here. But it has resulted in very remarkable changes in all forms of social life. The year at home is being steadily cut down to one half. In fact, our churches are not well filled until the first of November, and not in full action till Christmas, while immediately after Easter the attendance begins decidedly to decline. It is hard to get together a committee or board of directors for any charities or other institution before November. The public schools of the town, in the more well-to-do quarters, have not more than half their pupils when they open, and even now one remains closed till its children return in sufficient numbers to warrant opening, while the private schools begin much later. It would be worth while, if there were time, to speculate upon the present consequences and future development of this change which has come over the town since Mr. Jackson's day.

Yet Brookline did not have to wait for men of mark to come to her. Across this peaceful ministry ran the red flood of the Revolution. We trace in the town records the coming and going of the storm from the time when, in 1772, a committee was chosen, "to take under Consideration the Violations and Infringements of the Rights of the Colonists and of this Province in particular," through the raising of beef-taxes and bounties for soldiers, to the triumphant exercise of suffrage in choosing the first Governor and the first Presidential Elector. They were times that not only "tried" but tried out men's souls and brought many spirits to light. We find almost all of the men who could march gathered on the green before the

old meeting-house, where now the Austrian pine and the shrubbery grow, on the west side of the Parsonage lot, and three companies starting at once across the fields for Lexington. The captain of one of them, Isaac Gardner, Town Clerk and member of the School Committee, met with a fate which was deplored even in England. His name appears upon the church book as delegate with Mr. Jackson to ordinations. Among the active members was also that John Goddard, a Commissary-General of the army under Washington, who hid cannon in his barn, which is still standing, and stored his shed with powder and other supplies, a part of which were carried to Concord and played their part in tempting out the British expedition that spilt the first blood of the Revolution. It was he, also, who had charge of the three hundred teams which, on that moonlight night in March, 1779, stole across the country to Dorchester Heights, and built the fortifications which compelled the evacuation of Boston. Isaac Gardner and John Goddard ought to have memorial windows in the First Parish Meeting-house. Another widely known member of the church, and a man of remarkable power and courage, was Dr. Zabdiel Boylston, who was one of the first men in the world to grapple with small-pox, then a plague in New England. The Rev. Cotton Mather had told him of inoculation as practiced in Turkey, and he determined to introduce the practice here. In the face of passionate opposition, so bitter that it was not safe for him to go out in the evening, he persevered, and in time opened a hospital of his own. The men of science in England received him most cordially, and he was made member of the Royal Society. Then there were Thomas Aspinwall who led one of

the companies of Brookline men to Lexington and became a Colonel in the Continental army, and his younger brother, William, one of the most eminent physicians and surgeons in the country at the time. We must not fail to add the name of Elhanan Winchester, one of the most eloquent preachers the country has ever produced, who became one of those sturdy but now extinct Universalists that carried Calvin's reasoning to its logical conclusion, and claimed that if God could elect any one to salvation He could elect all, and that Infinite Goodness would not allow Him to do anything less. If we chose to include men who had recently come to town, we should mention Jeremiah Gridley, who lived across the street from this house from 1755 to 1767, and who, besides holding various town offices, was not only the first Grand Master of the Freemasons for North America, but was called the "Father of the Boston Bar"; and George Cabot, United States Senator from Massachusetts, who dwelt in the house now occupied by Miss Julia Goddard. Other names could be added from the old families of the town, if there were time, which would show still further that Mr. Jackson's congregation had its share of that solid worth, and keen, original, forceful intellect which made New England a seed-vessel for the planting of the whole country.

